

THE
SENSE OF THE PEOPLE:
A
LETTER
TO
EDMUND BURKE, Esq.
ON HIS
INTENDED MOTION
IN THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS, the 11th Inst.
CONTAINING ALSO,
SOME OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
PETITIONS NOW FABRICATING,
AND THE
PROPOSED ASSOCIATIONS.

O! QUIQUIS VOLET IMPIAS
CÆDES, ET RABIEM TOLLERE CIVICAM;
SI QUÆRET PATER URBIUM
SUBSCRIBI STATUIS, INDOMITAM AUDEAT
REFRANARE LICENTIAM,—— Hor.

L O N D O N:
PRINTED FOR T. BECKET, ADELPHI, STRAND.
M DCC LXXX.

BY ORDER OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

ATTEST

SECRETARY OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

WITNESSED AND SIGNED

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T H E
SENSE OF THE PEOPLE.

S I R,

I DO not address myself to you from any particular respect either to your abilities, or political integrity; of the former, you are doubtless endowed with a competent share, though I am very far from considering “the *throng of words*,” or the powers of elocution, as any proofs of solid sense, or sound judgment—of the latter, you possess precisely as much as your patrons and employers; the specific quantity of which will be in some measure ascertained in the course of this letter. But having assumed to yourself the consequential character of a reformer of mal-administration, and announced your intention of uttering a de-

clamation in the senate, by way of motion for a new system of œconomy and management. I think myself at liberty to anticipate the nature and design of your motion; and to make on it such observations as may tend to prevent the deleterious effects of poison conveyed in the fascinating vehicle of pleasing language, and specious argument, by stripping fallacy of its disguise, and following pretence through the various windings of artful insinuation.

It will not be altogether foreign to my purpose to bestow a few words on yourself;—the public have a right to such information as may enable them to distinguish the real efforts of public virtue, founded on principle, and warranted by property, from the factious and pernicious endeavours of hireling partizans and pensioned patriots; men who having neither interest, or stake in the state, let themselves out as the tools of the ambitious, to distract the councils, and subvert the measures of government; to lessen credit at
home,

home, and fully the national reputation abroad—sacred is the advice—respectable the judgment of the sincere, the faithful friend of his country; in a like degree profane is the declamation, despicable the oratory, of the wire-danced puppet of opposition.

You, Sir, are, I understand (I mean not to disparage, but fairly to represent you) a humble-born native of a sister kingdom, recommended by plausibility of tongue, and pliancy of disposition, you became a very necessary dependent on a nobleman, as remarkable for inclination, as inability to execute the highest offices of the realm; imported by him to this country, and placed by his interest in the senate, without a single acre of land, or a single shilling of apparent property, you stand forth the champion of a people with whom you have no connexion—The assertor of rights in which you are a sharer by courtesy only, and the defender of properties, in which

you have no other interest than the stipend allowed you by your principal.

THUS circumstanced, there can be no doubt but your intended motion will be presented in such a form, as will be best calculated to mislead the unwary, and impose upon the unknowing.—That you will suggest to them ideas of cruelty in the levying, and profusion in the applying the public revenues—of misappropriations in the civil list, and peculation in the public offices—of large sums paid for sinecure places and pensions, equally unnecessary, and unmerited; of ministers who oppress the people with new and heavy taxes for the purpose of enabling the crown to extend its prerogative, and establish despotism, and who, though universally ignorant, incapable and rapacious, are suffered to fill the several departments of state, to the exclusion of men able, informed, and so disinterested, that they are ready to occupy the offices of the present defaulters without fee or reward; nay even
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to surrender to the exigencies of the state the ordinary emoluments of their places— That these are truths which need no exaggeration—that they are felt by every individual—that you do not express your own private sentiments, or the opinions of a party, but the full apprehensions of the world at large—*The Sense of the People*—that impelled by fears for the safety of the commonwealth, and actuated by the most ardent zeal for its welfare and glory; you will move the House to address his majesty,

“ To remove from his councils, and
 “ all the efficient offices of state, every
 “ member, high and low, of the present ad-
 “ ministration, together with their several
 “ secretaries, deputies, clerks and assistants;
 “ and to put and place as principals in the
 “ said offices such persons as shall be
 “ nominated and appointed by the present
 “ opposition, who will execute the same
 “ without apparent emolument to them-
 “ selves, being desirous to transfer the
 “ odium of pocketing public money to
 “ their

“ their needy pensioners, and dependents.”

“ THAT his majesty will be pleased to
 “ recal, suppress, and discontinue all
 “ grants, sinecure places, and pensions,
 “ except only such as are held and enjoyed
 “ by the several peers and commoners
 “ now in opposition, their relations,
 “ friends, or adherents, which ought to
 “ be confirmed, and established in the
 “ fullest extent—and that his majesty
 “ will be pleased to remit and give up
 “ one half of his present revenue, and
 “ submit the management of the remainder
 “ to a committee to be named by his
 “ new ministers, who will take care to
 “ provide all necessaries for his majesty
 “ and his family, and to supply him with
 “ such sums for pocket money, as they
 “ shall think may be intrusted to him,
 “ without the danger of his committing
 “ acts of munificence, or beneficence,
 “ which may continue to him the affection
 “ of a grateful people, and thereby
 “ bring

“ bring the constitution into imminent
 “ danger.”

SUCH will be your motion in effect, in form of words it may perhaps differ, and it will require but little comment, for you will assert that it contains *The Sense of the People*, and serve it up as a preface to the several petitions speedily to be presented to Parliament, in which it will be expressed at large.

To these petitions then, the mode of obtaining them, the avowed and real purposes, and the intended and probable consequences of them, I shall now turn my attention, as a means of founding an enquiry, how far they may be considered to convey the true *Sense of the People*.

A CERTAIN set of Members of both Houses of Parliament, discarded Placemen, discontented Statesmen, disappointed Courtiers, for the most part needy, and all ambitious, having travelled through all
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the hackneyed roads of opposition, and tried over and over again all the chicanery of motions for accounts, revisions, and enquiries, determine to strike out a new path, and having in vain attempted within doors to frighten, perplex, and weary administration out of their offices, endeavour now to raise disturbances without, and either to awe them into a secession from their employments, or by one bold push to overturn them, and the constitution together. For this purpose they have righteously busied themselves, during the Christmas recess, in gathering together, under the sanction of the sheriffs, where they happened to be creatures of the party, and of the malcontent lieutenants of counties, where the sheriffs would not act under command, mobs composed of their own tenants, tradesmen, and more immediate dependents, together with that weak and unprincipled multitude, who having no properties to lose, or protect, are ready to obey every call to disorder. To these, one half of them previously trained to the
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business, and the other half totally ignorant and undiscerning, two or three flaming ready-made speeches are let off, full of the cruelty and oppression of the present Ministers, and replete with offers, assurances, and promises of those who wish to succeed them; recapitulating, on one hand, the burthen of taxes, an exorbitant civil list, ill-bestowed places and pensions, the loss of trade, the separation of America, the war with France and Spain, an approaching rupture with Holland, evils all fatally derived from the ignorance and wickedness of an administration possessing neither public credit or confidence, supporting themselves in their offices by mere dint of corruption, in defiance of all those dangers which threaten their country with immediate ruin, and in despite of the *Sense of the People*, whose voice has so repeatedly demanded their instant dismissal; and on the other hand, holding forth the blessings which may be assuredly expected from a change of men and measures, from the employment of those zealous patriots,

whose hearts overflowing with affection for their fellow-citizens, feel all their distresses, and, however reluctantly, are content to step forth in this crisis of national despair, and to bear the burthen of the state for the disinterested purpose of lowering taxes, curtailing extravagant dispositions of the revenue, restoring trade, healing divisions, and procuring a safe and honourable peace ; all which their wisdom and virtue will easily and speedily effect.

THE petition, ready framed and copied, is then produced, and immediately signed by the predisposed adherents of the party. The few whose weak minds may be influenced by weak, though inflammatory argument, and the many who, having no minds of their own, submit the direction of their opinions to the bystanders. A committee is appointed by whom the petition is handed round the county to such of the cabal as, by the rhetoric of strong beer, or the art of varying hand-writing, can procure a number of subscribers.

another committee of correspondence and association is named to be ready for further mischief; and then the very same leaders adjourn to another county, where they act over again the same play (tragedy or comedy, the event must determine) make the same speeches, produce the same petition, and promote the subscription of it in exactly the same way, citing always the example of the last county they performed in as an inducement for the next, and exhibiting the long roll of names, no matter how obtained, as unquestionable evidence of *The Sense of the People*.

THE reformation of the state, the removal of grievances, the establishment of œconomy, the honour and happiness of the people, are the pretences of the promoters of petitions; but what are their real motives? instilling into the minds of their fellow-subjects groundless suspicions, and causeless doubts of designs which never existed; mistating their own private views as the interests of the commonwealth;

wealth; attributing to the insufficiencies of government all our failures, and to chance or accident all our successes; hanging out pictures of public bankruptcy, ruin, and dismay, and then closing all with exhortations to the people to rouse—to assert their rights—to take the direction of the state into their own hands—to withdraw from a slavish and corrupt parliament, the trusts no longer fit to be reposed in them—and by their *own acts* to redress their own grievances, they first excite dissatisfaction which they hope to ripen into combinations, nay even tumults, if necessary, that so the king's ministers, interrupted by violence in all their operations, may be compelled to surrender their power into the hands of these disinterested patriots.

SUCH are the *intended* consequences of these fraud-fangled petitions! but there are others equally probable, that having thus wrested the power out of the hands of the Parliament, the only true representatives

tives of the people, the natural guardians of their rights ; and having reduced to a narrow compass the prerogative of the crown, they may themselves assume the reins of government, and the deluded people will then find to their cost, that they have made a wretched exchange of a Parliament even liable to a certain degree of corruption, for a democratic government, the licentious tyranny of a Congress.

NOR is it easy to determine which is most to be dreaded—the wretch who would abandon himself to the dictates of a Minister, who might be apparently disposed first to plunder, and then to enslave his country, and who would basely sacrifice the sacred deposit in his hands at the throne of despotism ; or he who, determined to gratify his resentment, or serve his ambitious designs, cavils at, and opposes every measure of administration, however necessary to the welfare, or however conducive to the good of the commonwealth;

wealth; who reviles the King with shameful indecency, and maligns his Ministers without truth or justice.

THE first is, God be praised! a character which cannot at present exist, the most gracious and benevolent monarch that ever sat on a throne cannot be served by bad-ministers, his example would correct the world; and in the mildness of our present government, we experience that his choice has secured to us the best.

IF, in the persons of the supporters and abettors of petitions and associations, any traits are discoverable of the second character; if the picture bears any likeness to either of the patriots of the present times, and I am afraid the resemblance is too striking to be mistaken, I need not caution my fellow-subjects to avoid him and every one of his confederates, and to shun the miscreant who would glut his beastly appetite on the vitals of his country.

BUT

BUT if this prospect is too alarming, if the petitioners (I would be understood to speak of the fabricators of petitions) have *themselves* no designs beyond the succession to places and emoluments, the means employed to obtain those ends threaten to occasion the mischiefs I have portended; distractions in the state, once created, are with difficulty subsided; and the ambition and avarice of a faction are often found to be diseases of so contagious a nature, as to spread by degrees through all conditions, till the end is universal anarchy.

OTHER consequences, though of a less serious nature, are also to be dreaded—political party usually confined to the metropolis, or at least to the higher orders of the people, will disseminate its baneful influence through every quarter of the land, and over all ranks of people—the labours of the honest farmer, and the industrious mechanic, are suspended, whilst, at the command of their landlords, or by

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the orders of their customers, they attend a county meeting—there they learn that taxes are oppressive and unnecessary—that the laws are cruel, and unequal, to which they have a right to submit, or not as best suits their convenience or inclination—that obedience to the governing powers is bending the neck to slavery, and that respect to the king is an encouragement to tyranny and despotism—possessed of doctrines so destructive, they propagate them at the parish meeting, and the alehouse—all classes of men become politicians, contempt of the legislature begets dislike to the restraint, and disregard to the effect, of the laws, and produces idleness, dissipation, and every species of vice.

FROM difference in political opinion, too often arise disputes and dissensions between friends, families, and neighbourhoods, dissolving the ties of natural affection, loosening the bands of friendship, and turning the channels of neighbourly kindness and communication, cutting off the
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intercourse of civil society, and threatening to bring the race of man back to their natural state of savage ferocity.

NOR is Religion herself exempt from the fatal consequences of these irregular and ill-timed innovations : the pulpits are become the trumpets of sedition ; and instead of the peaceful doctrines of Christ and his disciples, the meek spirit of obedience to the laws, and honour to the throne, so constantly inculcated in the divine writings ; the preachers of the faction abandon the precepts of christianity and morality, to encourage disrespect to the king, and denounce vengeance against his ministers.

DID the petitioning patriots act from any real principle, did they form even a single wish to advance the happiness of their country, would they disturb the public harmony, at a time when all her dearest interests are at stake ? when con-

cord, unanimity, and confidence are so essentially necessary to crush a daring and unnatural rebellion, and support a just and honourable war? Would they at such a time ransack the bosom of malice for charges against the directors of her councils, and the conductors of her arms? would they call off their attention from great and necessary objects, of no less import than the very existence of the state to trifling estimates, and childish calculations? Would they endanger the loss of millions for the probable chance of saving a few thousands? Would they inspirit our enemies by a bankrupt state of our finances, and depress the minds of the people with croaking forebodings of irretrievable ruin?

THIS is not the line of conduct which denotes the friend of his country; it marks out the designing, ambitious, restless, and interested partizan.

HAVING

HAVING thus freely, and I hope candidly, animadverted on *you*, and your intended motion—on *your* patrons and employers, and *their* petitions and associations—having, I flatter myself, established beyond a doubt, that *your* oratory is the produce of present pay, and that all *their* patriotic labours originate in the hope of future profit, and power—having enabled the plain, well meaning, unsuspecting freeholder (for whose sake principally I write) to distinguish the craft of the statesman from the virtue of the patriot—having exposed the fallacious pretences of the modern reformers, and exhibited their real views, the enquiry how far their petitions contain *The Sense of the People*, is rendered almost unnecessary.

It cannot be *The Sense of the People* to act in diametrical opposition to their own immediate interests, to be duped by the specious declamation of professed pensioners into a belief of oppression which they do not feel, of profusion which remains
unproved,

unproved, or of base designs in ministers, evidently struggling to support the honour and safety of the state by exertions at home and abroad, equally judicious and spirited.

It cannot be *The Sense of the People* to lop off a single shilling from the civil list, to cramp the generosity, or limit the munificence of a monarch, whose application of his revenue can only be in the exercise of those virtues by which he is so eminently distinguished, and who stands almost alone in the regal catalogue unstained with a single vice.

It cannot be *The Sense of the People* to express fears and apprehensions of designs in such a king to attain absolute monarchy, every act of whose reign has been calculated to preserve inviolate the constitution, and to convince his subjects that he only aims at pre-eminence in being the friend, the protector, the father of his people.

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It cannot be *The Sense of the People* to place confidence in the splendid promises, and delusive engagements of men once tried, and found wholly incapable of bearing the weight of government, the imbecility of whose administration laid the foundation of the rebellion in America, and the consequent war with the House of Bourbon, and who having been dismissed from their employments with the universal and concurrent consent of all parties, and distinctions, have been ever since labouring *per fas & nefas*, to regain their former establishments, and are now playing away their last desperate stake in the great game of politics.

It cannot be *The Sense of the People* that such men may be intrusted with the national revenue, as have dissipated and squandered away their own private fortunes, and patrimonies in political intrigue, and pursuits of ambition; nor to confide in the disinterested declarations of those who are beset with needy dependents, and
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ill paid pensioners, ready the moment their patrons can grasp the rod of power to blockade every approach to preferment, and leave no access to civil or military promotions, but through the phalanx of hungry secretaries, and rapacious deputies in office,

THE *Sense of the People* cannot be conveyed in petitions previously concerted, hastily, and artfully obtruded on the public, supported by no other men of consequence or consideration, than the select band of patriots in opposition, and their particular adherents and dependents, and signed by less than a twentieth part of the freeholders of the several counties where they have been obtained.

The Sense of the People is not conveyed in these petitions, because wherever the virtue of lieutenants of counties, or the manly determination of sheriffs, have afforded opportunity, they have been traversed, counteracted, and disavowed by so large a proportion of the most respectable

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freeholders,

holders, as to leave no doubt that a very great majority of such as are independent and uninfluenced, totally disapprove of the measure, as well as the matter of the petitions, and consider them as the dying efforts of discontented and disappointed faction.

The Sense of the People cannot be contained in petitions framed, and actually committed to writing, before they are proposed at the meetings, exhibiting complaints on subjects to which the persons required to sign them are entire strangers, proposing modes of redress, the propriety of which they are wholly incompetent to judge of, arraigning ministers with whose very names they are unacquainted, and of whose actions they are as ignorant, as they are of the motives, and designs, of those who have called them together.

THESE petitions do not contain *The Sense of the People*, because they suggest mistrust, diffidence, and want of confidence

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dence in the king and his ministers, which have no existence in the minds of the people at large, and most probably are ideas very distant from those of the petition-mongers themselves, however necessary the insinuation of them may be to answer their present purposes.

The Sense of the People cannot be expressed in representations of beggary and ruin, of the total loss of our trade, and decay of our manufactures, of universal gloom, despondency, and dismay; because it is apparent that individuals are rich and happy; that trade is extended, and manufactures flourish to a degree even unusual in times of war—and because the public spirit is unbroken, its vigour unabated, and hopes and expectations of success and conquest are almost universally prevalent.

It cannot be *The Sense of the People* to withdraw their confidence from the constitutional bulwark of their rights, a
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parliament of their own choice, and to place it in self-appointed committees, and junto's of men, assuming unprecedented and unauthorized power to alter the form of government, to break down the great fence of their liberties, to introduce a regulating system of controul over every branch of the legislature, and to establish a new and unheard of supremacy over King, Lords, and Commons.

It cannot be *The Sense of the People* to exchange their present free and happy government for that of a certain number of petty tyrants, acting under a description similar to the form usurped by the leaders of rebellion in America, and like them, under the pretence of securing their liberties, introducing real slavery, and exercising at will the most arbitrary and despotic sway.

It is apparent that it is not *The Sense of the People* to abandon the state as a sinking wreck, or to withhold their support from

the king and his ministers, because in this crisis of public difficulty (but not of despair or extreme danger) their purses have been open, and their hearts warm in the glorious cause of their country, they have contributed without a murmur to the necessary expences of war, and have armed themselves with alacrity to repel the enemy from their coasts.

It cannot be *The Sense of the People* to render themselves the objects of ridicule and derision to all the nations of Europe, by desiring to remove from the offices and councils of state, men of approved loyalty and unshaken fidelity, of characters which malevolence has in vain assailed, and envy attacked without success, to make way for Charles Fox and John Wilkes to guard the national finances, general Burgoyne to conduct the armies, and admiral Keppel to command the navies of Great Britain.

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The Sense of the People cannot be ascertained by public county meetings, and tumultuous assemblies, at which but a very small proportion are able, and a still less are willing to attend, where the speakers on the one hand are supported, applauded, and huzza'd by their less conspicuous associates the mob; and those on the other side, are hissed, hooted at, and insulted by these respectable and predetermined abettors of faction and disorder.

AND lastly, your motion and speech in the House of Commons on the 11th instant, will not contain *The Sense of the People*, because it will be intended to usher in, and prepare the house to receive petitions, manifestly reprobated and rejected by every sober and sensible citizen, by every well-informed, honest, and independent man.

It follows then, that *The Sense of the People* is not to be found in the speeches,
motions,

motions, petitions, associations, or other combinations of these self-denominated patriots, the members in opposition—that they neither have, or deserve the smallest degree of the confidence or approbation of the world at large—that they are acting on their own bottoms, playing their own games, and endeavouring to promote their own private views and interests—and that their opinions and conduct can no more be said to represent those of the people, than the addresses to Richard the Protector could be supposed to contain the hearts and affections of all the good people of England.

WHERE then are we to seek *The Sense of the People*? In the calm and still voice of reason and consideration; reason, which never expects to find perfection in any system of human policy—and consideration, which accounts and finds excuses for, involuntary, and, in many cases, unavoidable error. If we seriously wish to discover the real *Sense of the People*, we must avoid

public meetings, where noise overpowers sense, and the operations of prudence are stifled, by the outrageous vociferation of party-bullies, and search for it in the closets of retirement ; could we there question every individual, we should soon make the pleasing discovery, that the present *Sense of the People* expresses loyalty and affection to the king ; necessary respect for, and proper confidence in, his ministers ; a cheerful submission to the burthens which the exigencies of the state render unavoidable in situations of public distress ; a firm and manly dependance, that by the wisdom of government, and by the valour of our fleets and armies, we shall soon rise superior to the dangers which have threatened us, but which have already lost their tremendous aspects ; a ready obedience to the *law*, by which every blessing is made secure to us ; and a fervent wish to see public authority and private liberty stand together on that broad and immoveable basis.

SUCH

SUCH I am convinced is *The real Sense of the People*; and before you arrange your state of it for the public ear, compare the two representations with candour and impartiality. — The picture drawn by you opens a prospect dark, dreary, and uncomfortable—Augæan Stables to be cleansed—an Hydra's heads to be cut off—unspeakable labours to be gone through—and almost insurmountable difficulties to be overcome, before a single ray of hope can beam on this benighted country—overwhelmed with a load of calamity, and entangled in a labyrinth of perplexity, nothing less than the inflexible virtues of yourself and your party can be found equal to the arduous task of rescuing it from such accumulated misery: a task which the warmest animation of sympathetic affection, could alone induce you and them to undertake; but which the united force of wisdom and perseverance may in time effect—if unlimited power, and unbounded confidence be committed to these immaculate state labourers.

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ON the other hand I offer you the state of a nation involved, but not overpowered; struggling with difficulties, but not sinking under the weight of them: happy in a king, and satisfied with his ministry; enduring with patience the inevitable burthens of war; and looking forward with pleasing hope, and well grounded expectation to those happier days; when by the restoration of public tranquillity, by a safe and honourable peace, the necessity of additional taxation shall cease, or be supplied by the encrease of trade, riches, and territory.

YOUR auditors in parliament, and the readers of this letter, will not be at a loss to judge whose portrait is the most striking, and whose description most consonant to truth. I have endeavoured to found all my arguments in facts, and submit them to the public in the humble garb of plain and unaffected language, unaided by sophistry, and unadorned with the capti-

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vating dress of flowery diction, and studied elegance: the language of the heart is in my opinion best adapted to express
The Sense of the People.

I am, &c.